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C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
14 June 1966

ARMY and DOS review(s) completed.

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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HIGHLIGHTS

The militant faction is at least temporarily determining Buddhist actions in Saigon in the absence of Institute chairman Tam Chau; public prayer protests and demonstrations may occur in Hue tomorrow. On the military side, recent field analyses suggest that Binh Long and Phuoc Long provinces near Saigon and the coastal province of Quang Tin may soon become targets for major enemy offensives. In the North, US aircraft may have downed their second DRV aircraft in as many days.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: Viet Cong forces mortared US 1st Infantry Division base camp at Lai Khe (Para. 2). A three-phase Communist plan for a "monsoon offensive" in the II-III Corps area is revealed (Paras. 3-6). The PAVN 620th Division prepares for major combat in Quang Tin Province (Paras. 7-8). Trends in RVNAF 1966 desertion rates (Paras. 9-10).

II. The Political Situation in South Vietnam: Several thousand youths demonstrated in Saigon led by Buddhist monks and nuns in defiance of Institute chairman Tam Chau's appeal for nonviolence (Paras. 1-2). In Hue, Colonel Loan is personally commanding the combat police in lending assistance to Mayor Khoa to restore order (Paras. 3-4). The Hue Buddhists have called for a general hunger strike around the street altars for 15 June (Para. 5). Tri Quang, who remains in a Hue hospital in a reportedly deteriorating condition, has apparently prepared a plan for a graceful end to his hunger strike (Para. 6).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam: A NVN transport aircraft may have been shot down by US Navy fighters during a night engagement over the Gulf of Tonkin (Paras. 1-4).

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IV. Other Communist Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: Recent North Vietnamese statements characterizing US pilots as "war criminals" and calling for their trial may be in response to a current effort by Bertrand Russell to arrange a mock trial of "US war criminals" (Paras. 1-3).

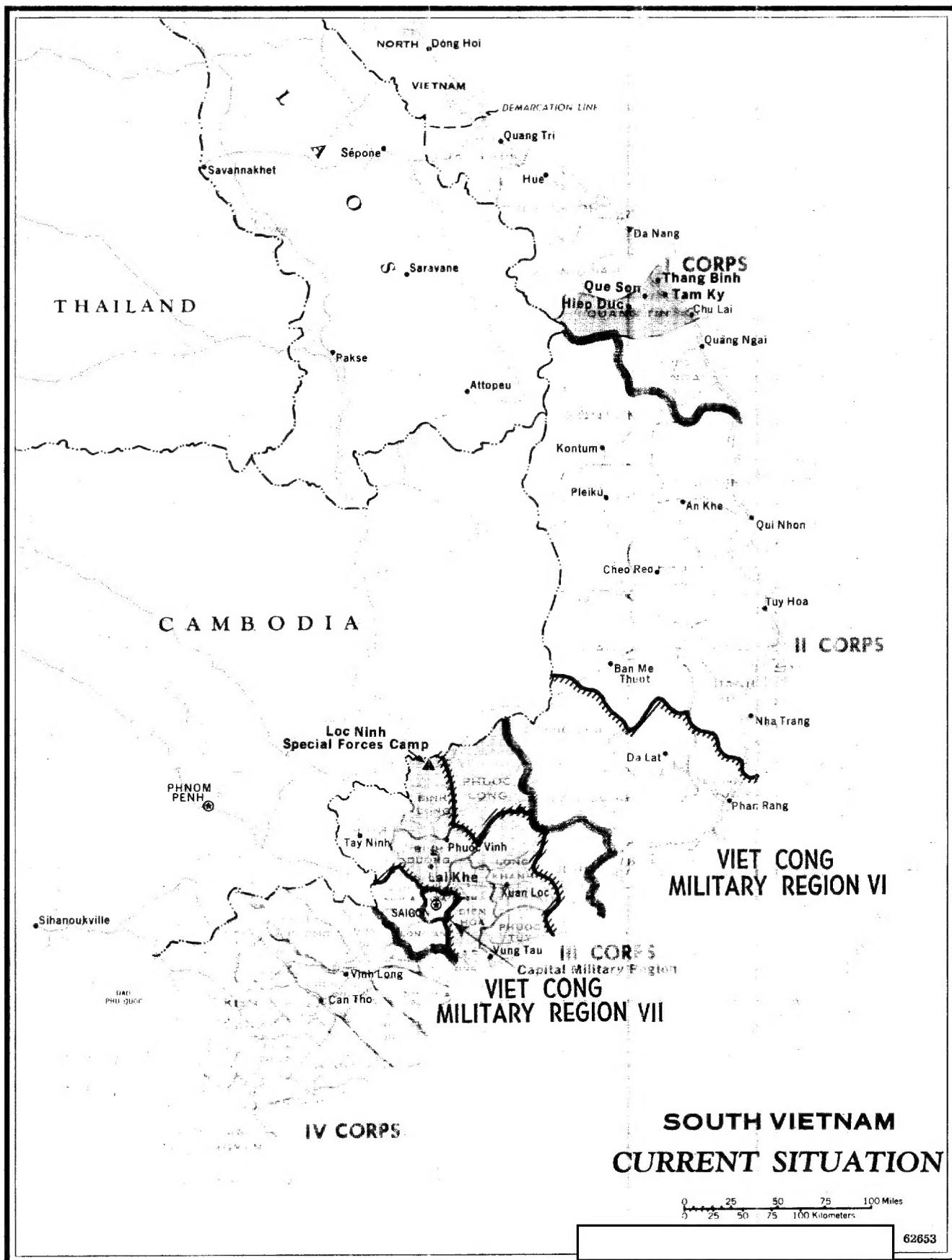
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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. No major contact has been reported during the past 24 hours in any of the 25 battalion-size or larger allied/Vietnamese search-and-destroy operations currently in progress.

Viet Cong Activity

2. Viet Cong forces last night shelled the base camp of units of the US 1st Infantry Division at Lai Khe, in Binh Duong Province, with 28 rounds of 82-mm. mortar fire. Four US personnel were wounded and two helicopters damaged.

Communist "Monsoon Offensive" in II - III Corps

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[redacted] revealed the communists' plan for a three-phase "monsoon offensive" in the II/III Corps border area. Phase one will be characterized by attacks by the Viet Cong 9th Division (MR VII Front One) in Binh Long Province, with the primary objective being the Loc Ninh subsector and Special Forces camp. In the second phase, the enemy's main effort will be concentrated in the Phuoc Long Province area. The third phase of the plan calls for completing the organization of the Viet Cong 5th Division.

4. According to J-2 MACV, the confirmation of two PAVN regiments (the 250th and 141st) in III Corps and the ARDF fix of a third PAVN regiment (the 101st) in Binh Long Province points to a considerable strengthening of the enemy military posture and lends credence to the validity of the documents. The documents indicate that an E.346 Regiment was recently activated in Viet Cong Military Region VI (MR VI) with its nucleus being the 840th Battalion. Documents also make reference to a 110th Division. If confirmed, this would indicate that a division-size force has been or is about to be activated in MR VI, with possibly the

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141st and 250th PAVN Regiments and the E.346 Viet Cong Regiment as subordinates.

5. The 141st and 250th PAVN regiments could have completed rest, recuperation, and training after infiltrating from the north and may now be prepared for combat operations. [redacted]

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[redacted] intensive reconnaissance effort by the Viet Cong in the northwestern portion of Phuoc Long Province closely paralleling that which preceded the 1965 campaign in the same general area.

6. The Viet Cong 9th Division, presently in the Binh Long area, and the Viet Cong 5th Division in the Phuoc Tuy - Bien Hoa - Long Khanh Province area could launch simultaneous actions in order to tie down allied forces in the Phuoc Long Province area and reduce their reaction capabilities, thereby enhancing the chances for success of the campaign. Elements of the Viet Cong 9th Division currently appear to be implementing Phase One of their campaign in Binh Long Province, although this may prove to be a diversion intended to force allied troops to focus their attention in provinces other than Phuoc Long.

PAVN 620th Division Prepares for Major Combat in Quang Tin Province

7. During the past two weeks. [redacted]

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[redacted] initiated incidents have provided further evidence that the PAVN 620th Division is concentrating in north-central Quang Tin Province in preparation for major offensive activity in the area west and northwest of the provincial capital of Tam Ky. Primary enemy targets appear to be the district towns of Hiep Duc, Que Son, and Thang Binh.

8. The 620th Division has previously been carried in the MACV Order of Battle with three subordinate regiments: the 1st Viet Cong and the 21st and 31st PAVN. However, statements by a recent PAVN defector, [redacted]

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[redacted] suggest that the alleged regiment may in fact be the fourth assigned to the 620th. Interrogation of a number of additional recent returnees indicates that a large number--eight or more--of combat support battalions are attached to the 620th, strongly suggesting that the division is being brought up to full combat strength.

1966 RVNAF Desertion Rates

9. The Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam (RVNAF) reported a total of 50,503 personnel losses for the first quarter of 1966, of which 34,030 were dropped from the rolls as deserters. Desertion rates increased once again in Regular and Popular Forces, but the Regional Force rate declined from the 1965 monthly average. Despite heavy losses, total RVNAF strength increased to 586,393 on 31 March from 571,213 at the beginning of the year, and it appears that Fiscal Year 1966 force strength goals will be met from Regular and Regional Forces, but that Popular Force strength will fall far short of its authorized strength of 185,000.

10. Regular Force desertions, following a decline in January, moved generally upward in February and March to a quarterly total of 18,667. Losses for the period ran at a rate of 20.1 per thousand as contrasted with a monthly average of 14.2 per thousand in 1965 and 8.3 per thousand in 1964. Conscripts, who on 31 March totaled 41,723, or 7.1 percent of the total RVNAF strength of 586,393, accounted for 31.5 percent of total desertions.

11. The Regional Forces dropped 4,064 men from the rolls as deserters in the first quarter, with losses in March declining to 1,119 from the February peak of 1,859. Losses in the first quarter ran at a rate of 10.4 per thousand, one-half the rate for the Regular Forces, and a decline from the monthly average of 11.7 per thousand in 1965 and 15.3 per thousand in 1964.

12. Popular Forces desertion rates, after dropping in December 1965 and January 1966, increased

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markedly in February and March for a first quarter total loss of 11,303 men at a rate of 27.8 per thousand. The monthly average in 1965 was 27.6 per thousand, and in 1964 25.5 per thousand. The continuing high desertion rate among Popular Forces troops--who have long borne a very heavy part of the combat burden--probably stems from low pay, lack of benefits for the disabled or for the survivors of men killed, shortages of uniforms and equipment, and the highly vulnerable nature of the outposts they are forced to guard.

13. Preliminary RVNAF desertion figures for April 1966 indicate: (1) a downward trend in Regular Force desertions to 4,470; (2) an upswing in Regional Force desertions to 2,800; and (3) a continued high level of Popular Force desertions--4,200. Total desertions in the RVNAF for April tentatively total 11,470, as compared with 8,382 in January, 13,241 in February, and 12,407 in March.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Riot police dispersed several thousand Buddhist-led demonstrators during the afternoon of 14 June after a crowd had earlier damaged US military vehicles and triggered a shooting incident in which a female onlooker was seriously wounded. The afternoon demonstrators, estimated at 5,000, filed out of the Buddhist Institute after tear gas grenades had been thrown over the walls, according to press accounts.

2. The demonstrations were in defiance of Thich Tam Chau's appeal on 13 June for nonviolence, including removal of household altars from the streets. According to press reports, the Institute council of monks which met on the 14th issued a communiqué invalidating Tam Chau's appeal. Chau was reported to have left for a nearby coastal resort city on 13 June, possibly as a result of his continuing lack of success in urging the younger Institute extremists to tone down antigovernment protests.

Developments in Hue

3. The opposing forces in Hue appear to have reached a temporary impasse, and both sides are maneuvering to strengthen their positions. Significant moves by the government include sending Colonel Loan, the director of the National Police, to the city on 13 June to command the combat police units. General Nhuan, the 1st Division commander, was reportedly replaced by the more loyal and effective mayor of Hue, Colonel Khoa. There has been, however, no confirmation of the change in official reporting.

4. Loan will reportedly rely on the efforts of a psychological warfare unit to convince shopkeepers to open for business and to persuade uncooperative students to turn themselves in. Loan's forces have apparently picked up a few draft dodgers and apprehended some medium-level "struggle" elements.

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Loan also claims that he will apprehend some of the other "struggle" figures he has located. A press report declared that the Buddhist rector of Hue University denounced two of the "struggle" force leaders as Communists, in a possible move to disassociate the extremist aspects of the "struggle" movement from the "non-violent" Buddhist stand. A similar instance of Buddhists isolating known Communist elements attempting to capitalize on the unrest was reported in the tribal capital of II Corps on 12 and 13 June when 21 suspected Communists were arrested.

5. The clandestine "Voice of Buddhist Salvation" radio called for a general hunger strike around the still-present street altars. The strike would take place on 15 June, one month after the government's move against Da Nang.

6. Tri Quang is allegedly so weak from his hunger strike in its sixth day that he is unable to communicate. He has, however, laid the groundwork to end it if he so chooses. A US consular officer in Hue reported that Tri Quang's plan is to have other monks implore him to stop when he is on the "verge of death." A senior provincial monk visited him at the hospital and urged him to halt the fast, according to a press account.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAMPossible Shootdown of NVN Transport Aircraft

1. A North Vietnamese transport aircraft may have been shot down by US Navy fighters during a night engagement over the Gulf of Tonkin. The prop-driven transport was participating in an attack on three South Vietnamese maritime incursion boats approximately 25 miles off the coast near Thanh Hoa.

2. Two F4B Phantom jets were launched from the carrier Ranger just after midnight on the 14th (Vietnam time) in response to radar and visual reports from the destroyer Coontz operating near the South Vietnamese craft. [redacted]

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3. In dark and overcast conditions, the US pilots reported seeing what appeared to be two propeller aircraft operating below 1,000 feet at speeds less than 100 knots. Pilot reports and fire control data from the Coontz indicate one of the slow-moving planes was hit with a Sparrow III missile. One crew member on an SVN boat was killed and four were seriously wounded, but all boats returned to port, according to MACV.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. The North Vietnamese in the past week have issued a series of strong propaganda statements calling the US pilots who take part in raids over the DRV "war criminals" and demanding that those captured in the DRV be brought to trial for their crimes. Commentaries in the regime press on 5 and 7 June claimed that the US pilots "are just like" the Nazi war criminals tried at Nuremberg and asserted that "we will make them (US pilots) pay their blood debt and try them before military tribunals." In addition, on 14 June Hanoi radio announced that at a rally of more than 90,000 people in Nam Dinh city a member of the city's Fatherland Front committee read a petition proposing that the US air "pirates" captured in North Vietnam be brought to trial before the people's tribunal and suitably punished.

2. These statements may be an attempt by the regime to garner the maximum propaganda effect from the current efforts of leftist British philosopher Bertrand Russell to arrange a mock trial of US "war criminals." The Hanoi press has openly praised such a move and the Fatherland Front speaker in Nam Dinh also warmly welcomed Russell's initiative. By pointing up the US crimes the regime may also hope to stir up further resentment against the US and at the same time cover up possible shortcomings on the domestic scene. For example, a Foreign Ministry statement on 13 June, in demanding that US criminals be brought to trial, recounted the crimes of the Americans and blamed the bombing raids directed against dikes and dams for floods and droughts which have hurt the rice crop.

3. Over the past year Hanoi has repeatedly characterized US pilots as criminals and has on at least one occasion late last fall published a demand by a local Fatherland Front committee for the trial of US pilots before the government's Supreme People's Court, but no trials resulted.

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